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SUBJECT: SUCCESSFUL JOINT US - BSEC ENVIRONMENTAL SYMPOSIUM

11. (U) Summary: On September 12-13 BSEC and the United States government jointly held a symposium bringing together government officials as well as representatives from the private and non-governmental sectors of the BSEC member states. The symposium was designed to explore the nexus between environmental protection and economic growth and development in the greater Black Sea region. U.S. officials from the Department of State and USAID as well as officials from UNDP, the European Commission and the Black Sea Commission also participated in the exchange of best practices. In her opening remarks, US delegation head EUR DAS Colleen Graffy stressed the need for governments, businesses and communities to come together to resolve environmental problems. In his concluding remarks BSEC Secretary General Amb. Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos explained

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that BSEC hoped to hold future symposia on environmental protection topics to complement international, regional national and local efforts and facilitate regional cooperation. End summary.

Background

12. (U) On September 12-13, the Organization for Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the Department hosted an environmental symposium entitled "Environmental Protection for Economic Growth: A Best Practices Exchange." Eleven of the twelve BSEC member states were represented at the conference; Azerbaijan due to a lack of travel funds (government representative) and expired travel documents (NGO participant) was not represented. All other BSEC member states (Albania, Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine) were represented at the symposium and post-conference feedback from participants has been very positive. More details on the conference can be found at www.aircistanbul.org/eproducts/bsec/bsec.html. BSEC and the Consulate General Istanbul public affairs section are preparing a bi-lingual (Russian-English) brochure and DVD that will contain video of the conference proceedings and copies of presentations as well as additional background material provided by the speakers and can be distributed by Embassy public affairs and ES&T sections. Queries regarding the brochure/DVD should be directed to Christina Tomlinson at Consulate General Istanbul.

Conference

13. (U) The conference opened with remarks by BSEC Secretary General Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos, EUR DAS Colleen Graffy and Deputy Undersecretary for the Turkish Ministry of Environment and Forestry Sedat Kadioglu. Turkey is the current

chairman-in-office of BSEC and also chairs the BSEC Working Group on Environmental Protection and was represented by a large delegation from the Ministry of Environment as well as an NGO and a private sector participant. All three speakers highlighted the need to work together on environmental issues despite political differences. Graffy noted that working together is extremely important because environmental problems "know no borders." Chrysanthopoulos and Kadioglu thanked the USG for the financial support required to hold this conference while Graffy noted her hope that this would be the first of many opportunities for the USG to work with BSEC on issues of mutual interest.

¶4. (U) The second session of the conference consisted of an overview of multilateral environmental efforts in the greater Black Sea region. Dr. Ahmet Kideys, Director of the Black Sea Commission, described the status of the Bucharest Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea with a particular focus on convention implementation. Andrew Murphy of the European Commission Directorate General on Environment explained the evolving Danube and Black Sea (DABLAS) Secretariat focus now that Romanian and Bulgarian accession

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to the EU has made the Black Sea an EU coastal area. Cagatay Dikmen, the Turkish national focal point for the European Environment Agency (EEA), described how EEA coordinates with the Turkish Ministry of Environment and other national environment ministries. Yegor Volovik outlined progress during the 2000 - 2008 UNDP-GEF Black Sea Ecosystem Recovery Project. The final speaker in this session was Anar Rahimov of the BSEC Parliamentary Assembly (PABSEC) who related PABSEC activities in the field of environmental protection.

¶5. (U) The third conference session dealt with present and future ecological challenges and economic opportunities from the private sector, government and NGO perspective. Costas Masmanidis, Secretary General of the BSEC Business Council

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described an environmental management system developed and implemented by the chemical industry. Giorgi Tskhakaia, Head of the Department of Licensing and Permission of the Georgian Ministry of Environmental Protection, explained recent reforms in the Georgian licensing and permitting regime as applied to forestry, fishing and mining. Evangelos Mylonas, Daedalus Informatics/Greece, focused on the need to increase the usage of renewable sources of energy and to change the "business as usual" paradigm. Semih Yuzen, Petfor/Turkey, described his company's experience with for-profit solid waste management and plastic bottle recycling. Gergana Stoeva and Hanifi Avci described Bulgarian and Turkish government efforts to protect the environment through urban wastewater systems in Bulgaria and Anatolian watershed rehabilitation projects respectively. Richard Johnson, a former USGS official described methods of conserving biological and cultural diversity through economic development. This Q&A session following this panel was particularly lively and focused.

¶6. (U) The fourth conference session was chaired by the Russian BSEC Senior Official, Sergei Goncharenko, MFA Deputy Director for Economic Cooperation. Central government officials from Bulgaria, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Turkey described the status of laws and regulations in their countries as well as on-going challenges and best practices. Topics covered included the challenges of implementing EU criteria (Bulgaria); land-based and marine sources of pollution (Greece); Danube river basin management (Moldova); coastal zone integrated management (Romania); territorial planning and risk prediction (Russia); economic instruments for environmental protection (Serbia); and special area protection (Turkey).

¶7. (U) The fifth conference session focused on NGO activities

in the energy and ecotourism sectors as well as municipal wastewater management. Nikoloz Kobakhidze, head of the Caucasus Regional Environment Center, gave a good presentation on the role of the NGO sector in environmental protection. Konalski Gkjoka, Institute for Habitat Development/Albania described efforts in increase the use of renewable sources of energy in Albania. Zhanna Galyan, President of the Armenian Ecotourism Associate, explained how environmental protection can lead to development of a sustainable tourism industry. Traian Croitoru, Water Management Company of Constanta County, Romania described how local government officials in Constanta County were working with the EU to improve waste water treatment. These presentations underscored the need to bring energy and tourism experts as well as municipal and local authorities into environmental protection discussions at an early stage.

¶8. (U) The sixth session was a pair of expert-led discussions on building public-private partnerships and on the enforcement of rules. Roberta Hilbruner, USAID office for development coordination and sustainable tourism, described successful efforts to foster rural development through sustainable tourism. Sureyya Isfendiyaroglu from the Turkish environmental NGO TEMA, described his organization's efforts to increase public awareness of the need for conservation as well as efforts to support sustainable agricultural practices. Dr. Nilufer Oral, professor of law at Istanbul Bilge University, explained the current status of internationally binding agreements concerning environmental protection in the Black Sea and called on participating governments to strengthen enforcement of existing agreements.

¶9. (U) In the closing session BSEC Secretary General Chrysanthopoulos reiterated his thanks to the USG for providing the funding necessary to host the symposium, called on BSEC member states to approach environmental protection in a sustainable and comprehensive matter, urged BSEC working groups on environment, energy and tourism to work together to link economic development and environmental protection and agreed that BSEC should hold similar symposia on a regular basis to facilitate regional cooperation and the sharing of ideas on environmental protection.

Graffy - Chrysanthopoulos Meeting

¶10. (U) Immediately following the opening session at which both EUR DAS Colleen Graffy and BSEC Secretary-General Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos made opening remarks, the two met briefly to discuss opportunities for future cooperation between BSEC and the United States. Graffy expressed her condolences for the recent fires in Greece. Chrysanthopoulos noted that the fires might have been caused by arsonists, but the problem was created by a lack of forest management exacerbated by five months without rain. Graffy agreed, noting that forest fires were also a serious problem in the

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United States. Graffy asked what sort of tangible result Chrysanthopoulos expected from the symposium. He admitted that the results of the September 10-11 Working Group on Environmental Protection were disappointing and "not up to my standards." A lack of financing combined with limited institutional capacity on the part of many BSEC members meant that the working group was long on process and short on substance. He expressed his hope that the symposium would focus attention on the need to think seriously on environmental issues and bring more practical issues to the table at future working groups. He thanked Graffy for the USG financial and technical support, which demonstrated the active interest of the USG in BSEC, noting that of the observers only Israel and Germany had had similar involvement.

Media Coverage

¶11. (U) The symposium received good coverage in the Turkish press. MSNBC affiliate NTV repeatedly broadcast a 90-second spot including excerpts from an interview with DAS Graffy as well as coverage of the opening session of the conference. The Anadolu Ajans wire service also covered the opening session. All three English-language newspapers covered the event. Turkish Daily News ran stories with photos both before and after the conference, while English language Today's Zaman published DAS Graffy's op-ed piece. There was no Turkish-language print coverage.

Comment

¶12. (U) Everyone we worked with at BSEC from Secretary General Chrysanthopoulos on down was very positive about USG involvement in BSEC in general and this conference in particular. The fact that the Russian representative to BSEC made a special trip to Istanbul and participated actively in the conference, chairing session four, was also a very positive sign. The Secretary General clearly stated his desire to work together with the USG on more such symposia both privately to DAS Graffy and publicly in the closing session. The BSEC Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS) has the administrative capacity needed to co-host a symposium of this size (approx 50 attendees) with the USG, what it lacks are funds. This two-day conference cost approximately \$30,000 in SEED funds and \$10,000 in Mission Turkey public diplomacy funds. Mission Turkey stands ready to work with Washington agencies and BSEC on future conferences; however any future conferences should be fully funded by Washington. End Comment.

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